

Embrace our service men and women

Barbara Wells is the director of the Meridian Senior Citizens Center. Many of the people who come to the classes and cook-outs, the card games and pool tournaments, the bridge games and club meetings, are retired from the military. Her story is about the people who come to the center — and the stories they tell about patriotism and sacrifice.

By Barbara Wells
special to The Star

It's a terrible thing how a country can endorse, and just as easily vilify, a war of its own choosing.

We may not all agree with our government and its actions — but when it comes down to the lives of our young people who have enlisted in the military to serve our country, we must do all we can to support them, in thought and in action.

I don't believe that nowadays anyone speaks ill of the great war, World War II. I've heard some wonderful love stories from that era. Frances Sparacino met her husband at Highland Park pool; she lived in the Complete neighborhood. He was stationed out at Key Field and would walk into town to see her.

My own father was stationed in England, where he met my aunt, who introduced him

to my mother. She used to tell me stories about the blitz, and going down into the fallout shelters. The closest I ever got to that was a half dug-out basement under our den. I can't imagine surviving an H-Bomb in there for long.

Mabel's love story

Being a member of the Round Table organization I'm fortunate to know Mrs. Carl Merritt. Every time I hear one of Mabel's stories, I wish I'd brought a tape recorder. She is a natural-born story-teller.

Over Christmas dinner, we were asked to tell a story of our most memorable Christmas. She told the story of a time just after Carl had enlisted and was on base during the holidays.

She said she could not stand it anymore and got a friend to drive her to the base, where she told the guard at the gate she just had to see her husband. When asked how long it had been since she had seen him, she told the guard it had been all of three weeks and she couldn't go another day without seeing him.

I suspect in those days three weeks was not very long. There must have been something very special about her, as the guard called back to the barracks and got a sergeant to rouse Carl and bring him to the gate. I like to think that kind of thing still goes on, but I doubt it. That was a time of innocence for our country.



Wells

I Could Not Imagine

Ginny Clair Hitt is a sophomore at West Lauderdale High School. She lives in Collinsville with her parents, Craig and Jan Hitt. The family attends Poplar Springs Drive United Methodist Church. Here's what inspired her poem: "I was thinking about my friends' dads who have gone to Iraq and what they might have felt — and I couldn't imagine my own dad going over there."

I could not imagine,
losing someone,
Telling them goodbye
For what seems like a lifetime.

I could not imagine
What I would say,
If someone I loved,
Got called to go away.

I could not imagine,
What a wife feels,
Having to be alone,
With no one to experience the
Day-to-day drama of little children.

I could not imagine,
Trying to tell a friend,
Everything was going to be OK.

I could not imagine,
Fighting for our country,
In a foreign place,
With no one there to wipe
The tears from your face.

I could not imagine,
Losing someone,
Telling them goodbye,
For what seems like a lifetime.

— Ginny Clair Hitt



Hitt

How close this war is ... to us

We were honored at the Senior Citizen Center to house the Veterans Memorial Screen designed by the art classes at Lamar Elementary School under the guidance of Janet Trest.

Many people signed it and took time to look through the picture books compiled of veterans. One of the snooker players at the center found a site on the Internet where you could enter your name, or the name of someone who served in World War II, to locate that individual. Simply go to a search site and enter "WWII Memorial."

I was curious if there was something like this for Vietnam vets. Of course there is. It is particularly moving. You can search by name and a page comes on showing a photograph of that person and a biography. Go to www.virtualwall.org.

Last week, one of the ladies who contributes at the center went to Hattiesburg to see her son off from Camp Shelby. My best friend's son-in-law is over in Iraq now. That brought home to me how close this war is to us ... and how we must not forget.

Whatever the outcome of this current war in Iraq, we must not turn our faces from our service men and women when they come home.

We did this after Vietnam and the shame still lingers.



ILLUSTRATION BY JASON COOPER

HONORING THE MILITARY

Jason Cooper of Meridian is a graphic artist who designed this illustration honoring members of the military who are serving, or have served, or are waiting to serve in the Middle East. Cooper's work has been published in "Art of Modern Rock: The Poster Explosion." His work can also be seen at his Web site, www.blackheartstudios.com.

SPEAK UP

Kristin Amerson interviewed her classmates at Southeast Lauderdale High School about how they would feel if their parents were sent to Iraq — and who they would stay with while their parents were away. Here are the results of Kristin's research.

Asia Atkins: "I would feel good, but then again, bad," Asia said. She would feel good because they are going for a good cause. She would feel bad because she would miss them too much. She says she would stay with a relative, but it wouldn't be the same as mom and dad — it just wouldn't be the same.

Holly Robinson: "I would feel very, very sad," Holly said. She added that her parents mean a lot to her, and if she had to stay with someone else, it would probably be Jason, her best friend.

Jari Minnett: She said she would feel sad and, even though she's not sure who she would stay with, she would not feel alone. "I would have faith that the Lord would bring them home safe."

Kayle Brown: She said she would feel sad and kind of lonely for awhile — and that she couldn't stay with any of her relatives for a long time. She said she would probably stay with one of her aunts who does not have small children.

Kendra Sneider: She says she would feel awful and very angry. She would be upset about the fact that her parents were risking their lives for a war she doesn't understand or agree with. Kendra is against the fighting and killing in Iraq, and says she would probably stay with her grandmother.

Tarquez Hopson: He says he would feel like someone who has had something stolen from him. Tarquez said he would be frustrated and hate them for taking his parents. He would stay with different relatives, like his Aunt Louise and Donna. Also, he said he would stay with his grandma and his cousin, Michelle Davis. His reason is because that is who he stays with when his parents go out of town.

Shatterria Kennedy: "I would feel sad and lonely," Shatterria said. She would miss her mom a lot, and said she would stay with either her mom's sister or her dad.

Shannon Campbell: "I would feel sad because I know my momma may not come back," she said. Shannon would stay with her cousin because she is like a second mom.

Lasondra Powe: "I would feel very sad and upset that they chose my parents," Lasondra said. She would stay with her grandmother because she is like another mom to her.

Kristin Amerson compiled this Speak Up question. She is a sophomore at Southeast Lauderdale High School and lives with her mother, Tonya Austin. Kristin attends Mount Calvary Baptist Church, where she sings in the choir and is a Praise Dancer. Her hobbies include singing, dancing, talking on the phone, playing the piano and shopping. Kristen would like to become either a beautician or a registered nurse.